

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 29, 2001

**For More Information Contact**

Trina Lee (804) 786-4265

Nancy Winter (804) 225-3626

Dr. Khizar Wasti (804) 786-1763

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EXPANDS FISH ADVISORY FOR MERCURY**

(Richmond, Va.)—Virginia's Commissioner of Health E. Anne Peterson, M.D., M.P.H., is expanding an existing fish advisory for mercury contamination in the South River, Shenandoah River, South Fork Shenandoah River and North Fork Shenandoah River. The advisory is being issued due to recent recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences and not due to any changes in the mercury levels. In the past several years, the mercury levels in fish from these waters have not increased.

The first part of the advisory restricts total fish consumption except for trout from the South River from the footbridge at the E.I. DuPont de Nemours Company in Waynesboro to where the North River and South River converge at Port Republic. "Stocked trout have been tested in the South River and are safe for consumption, but all other fish may contain levels of mercury that could pose adverse health effects," Dr. Peterson said.

The second part of the advisory concerns fish caught in the South Fork Shenandoah River from Port Republic up to where the river merges with the North Fork Shenandoah River, continuing north along the main stem of the Shenandoah River to the Warren Power Dam just north of Front Royal. This advisory also covers part of the North Fork Shenandoah River in Front Royal from the mouth of the river upstream to the Riverton Dam.

The second part of the advisory recommends that women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children should not eat fish from these waters. Other people are advised to eat no more than two meals per month of fish caught from these areas. "Following the advice of this advisory will protect people who eat fish from these waters from adverse health effects from mercury," Dr. Peterson said.

"The Virginia Department of Health recently revised the fish consumption guidelines for mercury contamination based on an extensive review of literature by the National Academy of Sciences," Dr. Peterson said. "Because of the changes we made to our guidelines, we are now expanding the fish advisory. The mercury levels in fish from these waters have not changed. We are now toughening our standards by lowering the amount of mercury recommended for fish consumption to provide more protection for the public," she said.

( more )

Page Two  
Fish Advisory

Mercury is released into the environment by both natural sources and pollution. Biological processes transform mercury in the water into more toxic methylmercury. Fish absorb methylmercury directly from water, sediment and from eating smaller aquatic organisms that contain methylmercury.

According to published scientific studies, infants, unborn babies and young children are at the greatest risk of suffering neurological disorders from exposure to methylmercury. Exposure to high levels of all forms of mercury can permanently damage the brain, kidney, and developing fetus. "In the past 20 years, no cases have been documented of people suffering from signs of mercury poisoning from consuming fish from the Shenandoah River, South Fork Shenandoah River or North Fork Shenandoah River," said Division of Health Hazards Control Director Khizar Wasti, Ph.D.

The Virginia Department of Health issues fish advisories based on the evaluation of fish tissue sample results provided by the state's Department of Environmental Quality. For more information on current fish advisories in Virginia, log onto the Virginia Department of Health's Web site on fishing advisories at [www.vdh.state.va.us/HHControl/fishing\\_advisories.htm](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/HHControl/fishing_advisories.htm)

###